

What is Claimed is:

1. A lipase enzyme derived from *Pleurotus sapidus* capable of catalysing the enzymatic hydrolysis of carotenoid esters to release free carotenoids.
2. A lipase enzyme according to claim 1, wherein the enzyme has an isoelectric point of about 5.7 and a molecular weight of about 101 kDa.
3. A lipase enzyme according to claim 1, wherein the enzyme is active in the absence of bile salts.
4. A lipase enzyme according to claim 1, wherein the enzyme has a substrate specificity for xanthophyll esters.
5. A lipase enzyme according to claim 4, wherein the xanthophyll esters are selected from the group consisting of capsanthin ester, *cis*-capsanthin ester, *all-trans*-capsanthin ester, zeaxanthin ester, and lutein ester, and mixtures thereof.
6. A lipase enzyme according to claim 1, wherein the enzyme displays a conversion efficiency of at least 69%.
7. A method for producing free carotenoids from their ester derivatives, comprising the step of contacting a carotenoid ester with a lipase enzyme according to claim 1.
8. A method according to claim 7, further comprising the step of isolating the free carotenoids.
9. A method of claim 7, wherein the carotenoid ester is contacted with the lipase enzyme in an environment substantially free of bile salts.
10. A method according to claim 7, wherein a cell-free culture supernatant of *Pleurotus sapidus* containing the lipase enzyme is employed.

11. A method according to claim 7, wherein the carotenoid ester is an oleoresin derived from a plant source.
12. A method according to claim 11 wherein the plant source is selected from the group consisting of *Capsicum annuum* L., *Tagetes erecta* L, and mixtures thereof.
13. A method according to claim 7, wherein the carotenoid ester is a xanthophyll ester.
14. A method according to claim 13, wherein the xanthophyll ester is selected from the group consisting of capsanthin ester, *cis*-capsanthin ester, *all-trans*-capsanthin ester, zeaxanthin ester, lutein ester, diesterified β -cryptoxanthin, capsombin, mutatoxanthin, luteoxanthin and violaxanthin, and mixtures thereof.
15. A method according to claim 7, wherein the free carotenoids are suitable for use as precursors of fragrances and/or flavours in perfumes and/or foods and as colorants.
16. A method for treating carotene-comprising stains, comprising contacting the stain with a lipase enzyme according to claim 1.
17. A method according to claim 16, further comprising contacting the stain with a detergent and rinsing to at least partially remove the stain.
18. A method according to claim 16, wherein the stain is additionally contacted with an enzyme capable of cleaving carotenoids.
19. A detergent composition comprising the lipase enzyme of claim 1.
20. A detergent composition according to claim 19, further comprising an enzyme capable of cleaving free carotenoids.
21. A detergent composition according to claim 19, further comprising a surfactant, dispersant, balance carrier and/or adjunct ingredient.